

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-11 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03

SS-20 USIA-15 SAM-01 SAJ-01 IO-14 AID-20 DRC-01 /129 W

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P 101100Z SEP 74

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1406

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, SY

SUBJ: DEBORCHGRAVE INTERVIEW WITH SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASAD

FOLLOWING IS COMPLETE TEXT OF INTERVIEW WHICH NEWSWEEK EDITOR DEBORCHGRAVE HAD LAST NIGHT, SEPTEMBER 9, WITH SYRIAN PRESIDENT HAFIZ AL-ASAD. NEWSWEEK WILL CARRY INTERVIEW, OR PORTIONS THEREOF, IN SEPTEMBER 16 ISSUE. DEBORCHGRAVE SERIOUSLY CONCERNED THAT SUBSTANCE OF INTERVIEW MAY REACH PUBLIC DOMAIN BY OTHER CHANNELS BEFORE NEWSWEEK PUBLICATION AND ASKED DEPARTMENT TO HOLD VERY CLOSELY TEXT AND SUBSTANCE OF INTERVIEW. ACCORDINGLY, REQUEST DEPT OFFICERS AVOID ANY REFERENCE, EVEN IF UNATTRIBUTED, TO SUBSTANCE OF INTERVIEW BEFORE PUBLICATION DATE.

INTERVIEW FOLLOWS:

BORCHGRAVE -- THE ISRAELIS SAY YOU HAVE FAILED TO BRING THE CIVILIAN POPULATION BACK TO THE CITY OF KUNEITRA ON THE GOLAN, THAT SYRIA IS CONSTANTLY VIOLATING THE DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT AND IS PREPARING FOR A NEW WAR. WHAT IS YOUR ANSWER?

PRESIDENT ASAD -- LET'S GET A FEW FACTS STRAIGHT. THE RETURN OF THE CIVILIAN POPULATION TO KUNEITRA IS STRICTLY AN INTERNAL
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AFFAIR AND NOBODY HAS THE RIGHT TO INTERFERE IN OUR INTERNAL

AFFAIRS. MOREOVER, AFTER SIGNING THE DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT AND BEFORE ACTUALLY EVACUATING KUNEITRA, THE ISRAELIS BLEW UP OR FLATTENED BY BULLDOZER ALL BUT HALF A DOZEN OF THE TOWN'S HABITABLE DWELLINGS. YOU HAVE SEEN YOURSELF ONE COLLAPSED HOUSE AFTER ANOTHER. IN SOME CASES THIS WAS DONE BY PUTTING LARGE CHAINS AROUND THESE SMALL HOUSES AND THEN PULLING THEM DOWN WITH A BULLDOZER. KUNEITRA IS NOW A COMPLETELY LEVELLED CITY -- NOT 95 PER CENT BUT ONE HUNDRED PER CENT. SO WHERE ARE THE CIVILIANS SUPPOSED TO DWELL? AND EVEN IF THEY COULD DWELL THERE, WHAT ARE THEY SUPPOSED TO LIVE OFF? KUNEITRA WAS AN AGRICULTURAL TOWN BEFORE. NOW ALL OF THE ARABLE LAND IS STILL OCCUPIED BY THE ISRAELIS.

QUESTION -- WHY DON'T YOU SEND CIVILIAN WORKERS BACK TO REBUILD KUNEITRA?

ANSWER -- YOU'VE SEEN THE SITUATION THERE. IF YOU WERE A SYRIAN CIVILIAN, WOULD YOU WANT TO WORK RIGHT UNDER ENEMY WEAPONS, IN SOME CASES ONLY A FEW METERS AWAY? AND WOULD YOU WANT TO REBUILD A NEW CITY BEFORE THE ISRAELIS HAVE RETURNED ITS LIFEBLOOD, NAMELY ITS AGRICULTURAL LAND? IT WOULD BE A POINTLESS ENDEAVOR. BEFORE GIVING UP KUNEITRA, THE ISRAELIS MADE SURE IT WOULD REMAIN UNFIT FOR HUMAN HABITATION FOR A LONG TIME, AND NOW THEY ARE ACCUSING US FOR NOT REPOPULATING IT. LET'S BE SERIOUS.

QUESTION -- ARE YOU VIOLATING THE DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT? WHAT ABOUT THE NEW ROAD THE ISRAELIS SAY YOU ARE BUILDING TO THE TOP OF MOUNT HERMON?

ANSWER -- THERE IS NOTHING IN THE AGREEMENT THAT SAYS WE CANNOT BUILD A NEW ROAD. BUT FOR YOUR INFORMATION I WANT TO TELL YOU THAT WE ARE NOT BUILDING A NEW ROAD NOW. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A FEW HUNDRED METERS, WE BUILT THIS ROAD DURING THE GOLAN WAR. THE ISRAELIS SHELLED THE EQUIPMENT WHICH OPENED THE ROAD WITH THOUSANDS OF BOMBS AND SHELLS FROM THEIR PLANES AND ARTILLERY, BUT THIS DIDN'T STOP US AND WE MANAGED TO GET TANKS AND OTHER VEHICLES TO A NUMBER OF PEAKS ON TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN. THE TOURISM MINISTRY IS NOW PLANNING TOURISTIC SITES ALONG THIS ROAD. SO YOU SEE HOW THE ISRAELIS ATTEMPT TO DISTORT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FACTS TO SERVE THEIR PROPAGANDA PURPOSES. WE SIGNED THE DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT IN GOOD FAITH AND WITH A VERY CLEAR UNDERSTANDING THAT IT CONSTITUTES A STEP TOWARD COMPLETE WITHDRAWAL FROM OUR TERRITORY IN IMPLEMENTATION OF SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 338.

SINCE THEN MR. RABIN TOLD YOU (IN A NEWSWEEK INTERVIEW) THAT EVEN IF SYRIA WAS WILLING TO CONCEDE TO ISRAEL THE KIND

OF PEACE AGREEMENT IT CLAIMS TO WANT, ISRAEL WOULD STILL NOT GIVE UP GOLAN. THAT IS A FLAGRANT VIOLATION OF THE LETTER AND SPIRIT OF THE AGREEMENT AS WELL AS RESOLUTION 338. SO, AS WE SEE IT, THE ISRAELIS ARE DELIBERATELY TRYING TO OROVOKE SYRIA IN THE HOPE OF FINDING A PRETEXT TO LAUNCH WHAT THEY CALL A PREEMPTIVE STRIKE.

QUESTION -- THE ISRAELIS CLAIM THERE HAS BEEN A MASSIVE BUILDUP OF SOVIET WEAPONRY IN SYRIA, WHICH AS ACCELERATED IN RECENT WEEKS, AND THAT YOU ARE NOW STRONGER THAN PRIOR TO THE OCTOBER WAR. IS THIS CORRECT?

ANSWER -- THE U.S. KNOWS THE SITUATION PERFECTLY WELL FROM SATELLITE OBSERVATION. OUR WARTIME LOSSES HAVE INDEED BEEN MADE UP BY OUR SOVIET FRIENDS AND I WOULD CERTAINLY HOPE THAT WE ARE STRONGER THAN BEFORE. HOWEVER, I THINK YOU SHOULD SEE ISRAELI PROPAGANDA AGAINST SYRIA AS AN ATTEMPT TO GET STILL MORE ARMS FROM AMERICA AND TO TRY TO RE-POLARIZE THE MIDDLE EAST SITUATION WITH THE SOVIETS ON ONE SIDE AND THE AMERICANS ON THE OTHER. AND BY WAVING THIS ALLEGED SOVIET THREAT, THEY ARE HOPING TO JUSTIFY TO THEIR PUBLIC OPINION AND TO AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION A RETURN TO THEIR STRATEGIC DOCTRINE OF JUNE 1967. I AM CONVINCED THAT YOUR ADMINISTRATION CAN SEE THROUGH ISRAEL'S GAME.

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1407

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QUESTION -- THE ISRAELIS ALSO SAY YOU NOW HAVE 3,000 SOVIET

MILITARY ADVISORS?

ANSWER -- WELL, ONCE AGAIN THEY ARE INDULGING IN GROSS EXAGGERATION AND OVERSIMPLIFICATION. WE DO NOT HAVE SOVIET MILITARY ADVISORS BUT A TRAINING MISSION WHICH IS HELPING US FAMILIARIZE OURSELVES WITH NEW EQUIPMENT.

QUESTION -- ISRAEL THINKS YOU WILL ASK THE SECURITY COUNCIL TO REMOVE THE 1,250-MAN UNDOF CONTINGENT AND RESUME THE WAR OF ATTRITION?

ANSWER -- IF ISRAEL REMAINS OBSTINATE AND REFUSES TO GIVE UP WHAT DOES NOT BELONG TO HER, IT SEEMS RATHER OBVIOUS TO EVERYONE -- INCLUDING DISTINGUISHED AMERICAN COMMENTATORS -- THAT THE MIDDLE EAST WILL BE HEADING FOR WAR ONCE AGAIN. AFTER ALL, THAT'S WHAT THE OCTOBER WAR WAS ALL ABOUT -- THE LIBERATION OF THE OCCUPIED ARAB LANDS. WHETHER THERE IS YET ANOTHER WAR IS ENTIRELY UP TO ISRAELI LEADERS. IN THE LIGHT OF WHAT WE READ AND HEARD, THERE WERE PEOPLE WHO EXPECTED THAT RABIN WOULD SET A NEW STYLE AND THAT HE WOULD PRESENT TO THE ARABS A NEW FACE OF ISRAEL. NOW IT IS ALREADY OBVIOUS THAT IT WAS ALL COSMETICS TO DISGUISE THE SAME OLD BANKRUPT POLICIES-- AND BAD COSMETICS AT THAT. THE LEADERS OF ISRAEL ARE EVEN CALLING FOR A MOBILIZATION OF RIENDS OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ISRAEL IN YOUR CONGRESS AGAINST FURTHER WITHDRAWAL FROM ARAB LANDS. AS FAR AS WE KNOW, THEY HAVE NEVER BEEN MORE BLATANT ABOUT THEIR INTERFERENCE IN AMERICA'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS.

QUESTION -- WILL UNDOF REMAIN ANOTHER SIX MONTHS AFTER ITS FIRST MANDATE EXPIRES AT THE END OF NOVEMBER?

ANSWER -- THE AGREEMENT STIPULATES THAT UNDOF'S MANDATE IS FOR SIX MONTHS, RENEWABLE SUBJECT TO OUR CONSENT. AND UNDOF, LET ME REMIND YOU, IS NOT HERE TO POLICE A CEASEFIRE BUT TO OBSERVE IT.

QUESTION -- FIRST, LET US SEE IF THERE IS GOING TO BE PROGRESS.

QUESTION -- RABIN SAID A FEW DAYS AGO THAT ISRAEL WILL NOT WITHDRAW FURTHER FROM OCCUPIED TERRITORY WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS TOWARD PEACE AND CANNOT ACCEPT ARAB TERMS FOR A SETTLEMENT BECAUSE IT WOULD MEAN THE "BEGINNING OF THE END OF ISRAEL." SO DO WE HAVE ANOTHER DEADLOCK?

ANSWER -- JUSTICE WHICH IS BASED ON THE U.N. CHARTER APPROVED BY ALL NATIONS REQUIRES THAT NO NATION OCCUPY ANYONE ELSE'S TERRITORY AND CONSEQUENTLY THIS MEANS WITHDRAWAL FROM ARAB LANDS. AND IF SUCH WITHDRAWAL LEADS TO THE END OF ISRAEL,

AS RABIN SAYS, THEN THIS MEANS THAT ISRAEL ITSELF IS BASED ON AN INVALID FOUNDATION. THIS IS THE ONLY CONCLUSION WE CAN DRAW FROM RABIN'S STATEMENT. NO PEOPLE IN THE WORLD CAN IMAGINE OR EXPECT THAT THE MAN WHO IS THE FIRST RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL IN THE STATE OF ISRAEL WOULD INSIST THAT THE CARRYING OUT OF JUSTICE AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE U.N. CHARTER WOULD LEAD TO THE END OF THAT STATE IN WHOSE NAME HE SPEAKS. NOR CAN WE IMAGINE THAT THE WORLD WOULD DEFEND A STATE BASED ON AN INVALID FOUNDATION.

QUESTION -- THEREE MONTHS AGO YOU WERE HOPEFUL THAT THE DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT YOU NEGOTIATED WITH DR. KISSINGER WAS BUT A FIRST STEP THAT WOULD LEAD TO FURTHER WITHDRAWALS. IN FACT, YOU EXPLAINED THE AGREEMENT BY SAYING THERE IS A LINK TO SUBSEQUENT STAGES. DO YOU FEEL YOU'VE BEEN DECEIVED OR MISLED?

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ANSWER -- WE DID INDEED SIGN THE AGREEMENT ON THIS UNDERSTANDING AND IN THIS SENSE. BUT ITS IMPLEMENTATION REQUIRES CONTINUOUS EFFORTS. AND UNLESS THIS UNDERSTANDING IS REALIZED, THEN THERE IS A CLEAR VIOLATION OF THE AGREEMENT-- AND A DEVIATION FROM THE ROAD THAT CAN LEAD TO PEACE. IF THERE ISN'T COMPLETE WITHDRAWAL AND THE OCCUPATION CONTINUES WE WILL HAVE CONDITIONS NOT FOR PEACE BUT FOR A NEW WAR -- OR THE SAME CONDITIONS THAT PREVAILED PRIOR TO THE OCTOBER WAR.

QUESTION -- AFTER COMPARING NOTES WITH EGYPT, JORDAN AND SAUDI ARABIA -- ALL OF WHOM RECENTLY SENT HIGH-RANKING OFFICIALS TO WASHINGTON -- WHERE DO YOU THINK WE STAND?

ANSWER -- IN THE LIGHT OF ALL THE CONTACTS THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE, I CANNOT SAY THAT THERE IS ANYTHING NEW. THE WHOLE MATTER IS STILL IN THE REALM OF AN EXCHANGE OF VIEWS AND A GENERAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE PARTIES CONCERNED AND THE U.S.

QUESTION -- HOW DO YOU THINK THE CURRENT DEADLOCK CAN BE BROKEN?

ANSWER -- ISRAEL DOES NOT HAVE ANY CHOICE. IT HAS TO MOVE FORWARD ON FULL WITHDRAWAL -- UNLESS IT IS CERTAIN OF FULL SUPPORT FROM THE U.S. I DON'T MEAN TO SUGGEST HERE THAT AMERICA SHOULD EXERCISE PRESSURE AGAINST ISRAEL IN ORDER TO BREAK THE DEADLOCK. IT WOULD BE ENOUGH FOR ISRAEL TO REALIZE THAT THE U.S. WILL NOT EXERCISE ANY PRESSURE IN ITS FAVOR.

QUESTION -- BUT EVEN IF ISRAEL COULD BE PERSUADED TO END ITS

OCCUPATION OF THE WEST BANK OF JORDAN, THE ARABS CANNOT SEEM TO AGREE AMONG THEMSELVES ON WHETHER KING HUSSEIN OR THE PLO HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR NEGOTIATING THE TERRITORY'S RETURN. DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS?

ANSWER -- INTERARAB PROBLEMS CAN BE SOLVED AMONG THE ARABS THEMSELVES AND, BELIEVE ME, THERE IS NO PROBLEM WHICH IS SO COMPLICATED THAT WE CAN'T REACH AGREEMENT ON IT.

QUESTION -- BUT WHAT ARE YOUR OWN IDEAS? DO YOU THINK KING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HUSSEIN SHOULD RELINQUISH WHAT HE REGARDS AS HIS RESPONSIBILITY, AS THE REPRESENTATIVE OF PALESTINIANS LIVING IN JORDAN, TO THE PLO -- AND THEN LET THE PLO TRY TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE U.S. AND/OR ISRAEL? OR SHOULD KING HUSSEIN BE GIVEN THE MANDATE BY THE ARAB STATES?

ANSWER -- WITH REGARD TO THE ISRAELI AGGRESSION AS A WHOLE, THE PLO HAS A ROLE TO PLAY AND SO DOES KING HUSSEIN. BUT THE LIMITS OF EACH ROLE IS A THING WHICH IS NOW UNDER DISCUSSION AMONG THE PARTIES CONCERNED.

QUESTION -- IF THE WEST BANK AVENUE REMAINS BLOCKED BECAUSE OF THIS IMPASSE, WOULD YOU FAVOR THE NEXT STEP TAKING PLACE IN SINAI?

ANSWER -- NO, WE ARE AGAINST ANY PARTIAL SOLUTIONS. IT WOULDN'T SERVE THE PURPOSE OF PEACE. THE PROBLEM SHOULD BE TREATED AS A WHOLE -- WITH RADICAL TREATMENT IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE, AT LONG LAST, A REAL AND JUST PEACE. END
MURPHY

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